

Viewing the Risvold Americana Collection

by John F. Dunn

On January 27-29 Spink Shreves Galleries presented the fabulous Floyd Risvold Collection: "American Expansion & the Journey West." As the title suggests, this was more than just a cover collection, as it included documents, literature and other material, including covers. In this "viewing" we will look at some of the highlight covers. (It will take more than one installment here, and I will also be presenting other material in a series in our sister publication, *Mekeel's & Stamps*.)

The auction opened with the Colonial Period, filled with lots of historical interest. Among those with a postal history connection was this cover from the Braddock Expedition, sent by Henry Walker and datelined "Petersburg up Appamatox James River, Virginia," on August 3, 1755, addressed to his father at Whitehaven, England, endorsed "p the How / Capt Eilbeck" and carried privately. The letter states,

"Gen. Braddock with 1300 chosen Men and officers were attacked by the French and Indians... and

after a Bloody action of Three & a half Hours our Troops yielded Ground. We lost all our provision Artillery Stores and Baggage of every kind, and by much the greatest part of our Officers... We are informed the French and Indians were not in number above 400 whose method of fighting were sticking on every side behind logs and bushes and by aying a train of powder and setting it on fire our troops kept firing at the smoak till the were half killed and not knowing what they fired at and the Indians firing from every side drop'd them like Bees. It is reported that Washington a Virginian who was our late Generall in our Expedition last year rode up to General Braddock and advised him to break his men and take the Indian Method of fighting behind the Bushes but he refused so by that means lost the Battle. Washington last year with three Hundred Men was attacked by Nine hundred and by his good noshons of there way, kill'd upwards of three Hundred of theirs with the loss of Seventy kill'd and wounded..." Estimated at \$4,000-5,000, this fabulous historical report sold for \$19,000.

(All prices reported here do not include the Buyers' Premiums that are added on to these hammer prices. In this auction, the premium was 20% of the successful bid price of each lot up to and including \$2,000 plus 15% of the excess over \$2,000.)

As an example of a strictly postal history lot, I selected this cover with a "NUEVA/ORLEANS," red circular Spanish Colonial Period handstamped postmark, the earliest handstamped postmark in private hands from the Trans-Mississippi West. The April 19, 1790 folded letter to Bordeaux, France, also shows a manuscript "16" decimes due and a red "YNDIAS" handstamp, indicating that it came from the West Indies and



then was forwarded to Bordeaux. Estimated at \$7,500-10,000, this lot fetched \$28,000.

Next, an eyewitness account to history, a British artiller-

lery officer's folded letter datelined "HMS Royal Oak, Patuxent River, Sept 2nd, 1814" to Gloucester, England, and rated

"1/2", also showing a large double oval Portsmouth ship letter handstamp that was applied on arrival and re-rated "1/10" for forwarding to Somers. The includes "...On the 23rd it was determined that we should march against Washington...we pursued the enemy on the 24th who retired into Washington...In the evening, the army marched into Washington, a few muskets only being fired on us—then immediately proceeded to burn the Capitol, a most handsome, elegant building—the President's house and all the public offices—the enemy himself set fire to the dockyard arsenal and all his military storehouses and in the morning we proceeded to accomplish the destruction of the cannon and everything which had escaped the flames. The loss of the Americans must have been immense, there were seven or eight magazines blown up during the night..." Estimated at \$2,000-3,000, this lot fetched \$13,000.

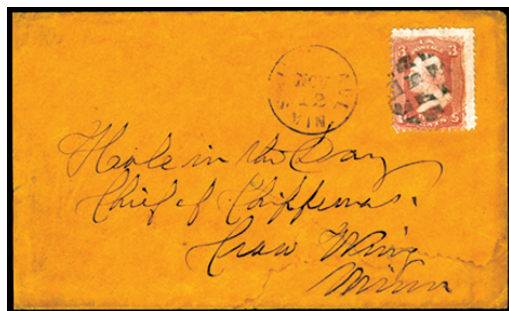


This next lot combines postal history with an account of the fur trade in 1837. It is the earliest recorded cover from the present day North-

west Territory interior to a foreign destination. Datelined "Fort Simpson McKenzie River, 15th March, 1837", it was carried by Hudson's Bay Co. canoe brigade express to York Factory on Hudson's Bay, then by H.B.C. ship to London, arriving with stepped "Deal/Ship Letter".

In the letter, Robert Campbell, a fur trader and explorer who discovered the source of the Yukon River, writes: "At this

place and Fort de Liard provisions have not been for some years past so plenty...Mr Bell had by accounts 31st Jan. furs in store to the value of about \$3000...we have but very few rats this year but martens, beaver and lynx are better and more valuable...the Marten Lake Indians who have the last two years visited us pretty regular and...have brought us about 1500 martens. Estimated at \$3,000-4,000, it sold for \$5,000.



From the Indian Wars period, we see this cover with a 3¢ rose (Sc. 65) tied by waffle grid with matching “Saint Paul, Min/Nov 12” datestamp. It

is addressed to “Hole in the Day, Chief of Chippewas, Crow Wing, Minn.” and includes a photo of the chief on a railway advertising card. Per the lot description, “Hole-in-the-day was chief of the Pillager band of the Chippewa Indians at Crow Wing. He was one of the insurgent leaders among the Indians during the uprising and was assassinated by members of his tribe on June 17, 1868 at Crow Wing.” The cover was estimated at \$300-400 and went for \$550.

From the Santa Fe Trail section I selected this Socorro, New Mexico, 1849 folded letter with manuscript “Paid to Ft. Leavenworth/H.W. Edgar/P M/Socorro, N.M./Nov 20/49” military period postmark and with directive “Via San An-



tonio.” According to the lot description, “...it is doubtful that it went that way as the military was running regular expresses directly to Fort Leavenworth....” It entered the mails with a red “Fort Leavenworth, Mo./Feb 7” datestamp and matching “5” rate handstamp being applied. It is addressed to Coleman Younger, described as “Coleman and William Younger were famous as guerillas with William Quantrill in the Civil War and later rode with the James boys as bank robbers”. This cover bears the only known Socorro postmark during the military period. The letter was written by William L. Smith, a forty-niner on the Mexican Gold Trail on his way to the California gold fields via the old El Camino Real to Mazatlan and thence by steamer to San Francisco. Smith was traveling from Socorro to Mazatlan, via Chihuahua and Durango, using a two mule carriage. He planned to form up with a company of Americans, because of the dangers of passing through a country plagued by Indian marauders and robbers. At the time of this letter Socorro was a small adobe village under military occupation, garrisoned by a detachment of the U.S. Dragoons. Estimated at \$5,000-7,500, this cover soared to \$45,000.

To Be Continued